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Chairman: Mr. Glanzer (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Austria)

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97-82760 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 98: Environment and sustainable development (*continued*) (A/52/25, A/52/112, A/52/217-S/1997/507, A/52/284, A/52/318, A/52/347, A/52/447-S/1997/775, A/52/460, A/52/514-S/1997/815)

(b) Implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa (A/52/549)

(d) International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (A/52/560, A/52/561 and A/52/413)

1. **Mr. Coppini** (Italy) said he would report on the first session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa, on behalf of its President. Participants in the first session, hosted jointly by the Government of Italy and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), had given strong political impetus to the Convention. They had included two Vice-Presidents, a Deputy Prime Minister, over 45 Ministers of State, 102 parties to the Convention and 18 observer States. The permanent secretariat of the Convention would be located in Bonn and have an operating budget of over $US 6 million. The Global Mechanism for the mobilizing of financial resources for the implementation of the Convention would be housed at the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) in Rome. Both the permanent secretariat and the Global Mechanism would need the support of all interested institutions.

2. The Convention dealt with a wide range of issues relating to both the environment and development. Desertification and drought aggravated food insecurity, migratory flows, urban poverty and civil unrest. In that context, the participants in the first session of the Conference of the Parties had called on all countries and regional economic integration organizations which had not yet done so to ratify or accede to the Convention at the earliest possible date and to join in the common effort to prevent further degradation of the world's drylands. To that end, the commitment, resources and experience of developed countries were urgently needed.

3. A number of parallel events held during the session in Rome had reflected the involvement of civil society in combating desertification. They had included a Forum of Non-Governmental Organizations, a Media Outreach Workshop and Seminar and a Forum of Mayors on Cities and Desertification, which had reviewed activities by municipalities from the North and South.

4. The Conference of the Parties requested the Secretary-General to take action regarding the institutional linkage between the Convention secretariat and the United Nations; the use of funds under the authority of the head of the Secretariat; the inclusion of the second session of the Conference of the Parties, to be held in Dakar, Senegal, in the United Nations calendar of conferences and meetings for 1998; and the approval of conference-servicing costs for the transitional period until its secretariat was relocated to Bonn (A/52/549, para. 40). The Secretary-General, in consultation with the Bureau of the Conference of the Parties, would authorize the use of the Special Voluntary Fund in order to ensure that representatives of developing countries participated in the second session of the Conference of the Parties, and the use of the Trust Fund in order to sponsor the participation of non-governmental organizations.

5. The Conference of the Parties had decided to establish a relationship with the United Nations but not to integrate Convention activities into the work programme and management structure of any particular department or programme, along the lines of the arrangement enjoyed by the secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The General Assembly must now endorse such a linkage, which would facilitate the financial and personnel operations of the Convention secretariat. With a view to the convening of the second session of the Conference of the Parties in September 1998, he expressed the hope that a broad coalition of the parties, multilateral and bilateral institutions and civil society would be formed to implement the Convention.

6. **Mr. Diallo** (Executive Secretary of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa) introduced the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Convention (A/52/549), whose annex contained the decisions adopted by the Conference of the Parties at its first session. In connection with its decision to maintain its permanent secretariat in Bonn, agreements would be concluded with Germany. The interim secretariat within the United Nations programme budget would cease to function on 1 January 1999.

7. Further to its decision to house the Global Mechanism at IFAD in Rome, the Conference of the Parties had invited IFAD to work closely with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank. In that context,

UNDP would propose a Director for the Global Mechanism, who would be formally recruited by IFAD. The overall objective of the Global Mechanism would be to increase the flow of resources for the implementation of the Convention and enhance the effectiveness of existing financial mechanisms. The Conference of the Parties had also adopted a programme budget for the year 1999, rules of procedure, financial rules and procedures for the communication of information and review of implementation of the Convention.

8. The Conference of the Parties had adopted decisions concerning the institutional linkage of the Convention's permanent secretariat with the United Nations Secretariat, based on the precedent set by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change; support to the activities of regional action programmes in Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, Asia and the northern Mediterranean region; increased collaboration with other conventions such as the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change; and greater involvement of non-governmental organizations in its next work programme.

9. The Conference of the Parties had also adopted decisions concerning the work of the Committee on Science and Technology with regard to networking, benchmarks and indicators, collaboration with other scientific bodies and the application of traditional knowledge.

10. A high level segment had given political support to the implementation of the Convention. On that occasion, an innovative dialogue between representatives of Governments and non-governmental organizations had been launched.

11. He thanked those international organizations which had contributed to the Trust Fund established to ensure the participation of representatives of developing countries in the meetings of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee and the Conference of the Parties. Thus far, 114 countries had either ratified or acceded to the Convention. He appealed to those countries which had not yet done so, particularly the States members of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the countries of Eastern and Central Europe, to become parties to the Convention at the earliest possible date.

12. **Mr. Boullé** (Director of the Secretariat for the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction) introduced the report of the Secretary-General on the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (A/52/560) and the report of the Secretary-General on improved effectiveness of early-warning systems with regard to natural and similar disasters (A/52/561). At the dawn of the twenty-first century, rapid urbanization, environmental degradation and increased industrial activities aggravated the risk of major disasters. Indeed, the number of major natural disasters in the past decade had been four times as high as that in the 1960s. Science and technology alone would not be sufficient to deal with disaster prevention on that scale; the human factor must also be taken into account. Disaster reduction must be incorporated in national sustainable development policies and economic planning. In view of the escalating cost of disasters, the current response-oriented approach must be replaced by prevention and mitigation activities.

13. Early-warning systems would be effective only if they were developed jointly by scientific and technological experts and national and local community structures. The Secretary-General's report, which had been prepared with the participation of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), FAO and non-governmental organizations, was an important step in the preparatory process for the international conference on early-warning systems for the reduction of natural disasters, to be held in Potsdam, Germany, in 1998.

14. The annex of the report on the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction contained the proposals of its Scientific and Technical Committee for the closing of the Decade, including its recommendation that disaster reduction should be designated as the theme for the high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council in 1999. It also proposed the organization of a programme forum in Geneva, to be financed from extrabudgetary resources, for all Decade partners, including the scientific and technical community, non-governmental organizations and national committees for the Decade.

15. The Action Plan of the Decade for 1998-1999 focused on hazard vulnerability and risk assessment, disaster prevention and sustainable development, early warning issues, political and public policy commitments and shared knowledge and technology transfer. A major activity of the Action Plan would be the anticipation of the type of disasters likely to prevail in the twenty-first century (A/52/560, para. 27). The El Niño phenomenon and the fires in Indonesia were examples of "new disasters" which it should be possible to forecast with greater accuracy. Another important activity would be the dedication of the World Disaster Reduction Campaign in 1998 to the theme of "Disaster prevention and the media". Disaster awareness-building campaigns were conducted in more than 100 countries.

16. The final two years of the Decade were crucial to ensure not only that its goals were met but also that the

projection of disaster reduction, or risk management, was a component of government policies in the twenty-first century. To that end, the Decade, which was exclusively funded from extrabudgetary resources, needed the support of Member States. He thanked a number of Governments, national Decade committees, non-governmental organizations and United Nations agencies and regional programmes for their contributions to the work of the Decade and expressed the hope that it would receive their continued support.

17. **Mr. Kamando** (United Republic of Tanzania), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, welcomed the fact that 114 countries had ratified the Convention to Combat Desertification thus far. He urged others to do so at the earliest possible date in order to ensure its universality. The implementation of the Convention would not be effective unless assistance was provided to affected countries, particularly those in Africa, in the area of capacity-building. Further cooperation in scientific research and the transfer of technology were necessary in order to ensure that affected countries acquired the knowledge and skills to combat desertification and drought.

18. The implementation of the Convention also called for a substantial increase in financial resources, including new and additional funding. In that connection, the Group of 77 and China welcomed the decision of the Conference of the Parties to house the Global Mechanism at IFAD in Rome and to cooperate fully with UNDP and other organizations, including the World Bank.

19. He was pleased to announce that many affected developing countries had already prepared national action programmes, pursuant to their commitments under the Convention. The Group of 77 and China were grateful for the support provided during the interim phase of the Convention to the launching of national, subregional and regional action of programmes by Governments, regional economic integration organizations, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, specialized agencies and the funds and programmes of the United Nations system, in particular UNDP through its Office to Combat Drought and Desertification (UNSO).

20. In conclusion, UNDP, IFAD and the World Bank should establish a facilitation committee for the Global Mechanism at the earliest possible date, in accordance with the decisions of the first session of the Conference of the Parties.

21. **Mr. Meyer** (Luxembourg), speaking on behalf of the European Union and the associate countries of Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, welcomed the outcome of the first session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention to Combat Desertification, particularly the consensus reached on the Global Mechanism and the location of its permanent secretariat. The European Union also welcomed the fact that a number of countries, particularly in Africa, had already begun work on national action programmes to combat desertification. Implementation of the Convention required close cooperation between the United Nations and the affected countries; in that connection, the role of the Organization must be increased.

22. The interest of the European Union in combating desertification was reflected in its large financial contribution to that end. That commitment had been renewed during the first session of the Conference of the Parties. All of its 15 members had ratified the Convention, and ratification by the European Community itself would be completed in the coming weeks.

23. Progress achieved in combating desertification had contributed to poverty eradication and food security. In that context, the European Union welcomed the Convention's special focus on drought and desertification in Africa, where most of the poorest countries were located. It supported the "bottom-up" approach proposed by the Convention, since the participation of local communities and, in particular, women, was crucial at every stage of its implementation. The Union was also extremely pleased that a European city had been chosen to host the Convention's permanent secretariat, reflecting the European Union's commitment to combating desertification. Cooperation by the Convention's secretariat with the secretariats for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity should be increased with a view to taking an integrated approach to the three closely related issues.

24. The proliferation of natural disasters, particularly water-related disasters, highlighted the importance of international cooperation in that area. The European Union was pleased that, within the framework of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, the United Nations was actively assisting countries to integrate disaster prevention and emergency preparedness into their overall development programmes. It attached great importance to the elaboration and strengthening of the early-warning systems outlined in General Assembly resolutions 49/22 B and 50/117 B and a regional and subregional framework for natural disaster prevention.

25. The European Union expressed regret, however, at the lateness of the report of the Secretary-General on the closing of the Decade in the year 2000.

26. **Mr. Biaou** (Benin), speaking on behalf of the African Group said he supported the statement by the representative of the United Republic of Tanzania on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The countries of Africa and other developing countries bore relatively little responsibility for the deterioration of the global environment, and they therefore accorded priority to restoring and protecting their local, national, subregional and regional environments. However, they supported global environmental protection efforts as well. Poverty eradication remained the key strategy of the African countries' effort to combat desertification and achieve sustainable development.

27. The positive outcome of the first session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention to Combat Desertification represented an important step towards the effective implementation of the provisions of that instrument. The African countries hoped that the Global Mechanism would be successful in mobilizing resources and channelling them to the developing countries, in particular those in Africa, including African non-governmental organizations, which had an important role to play in the implementation of the Convention at the local level.

28. He was pleased that the first session of the Committee on Science and Technology had met during the first session of the Conference of Parties. The recommendations concerning regional inventories of traditional and local technology, knowledge and know-how should make it possible to put to use the experience gained by the African countries through modern technology, thereby helping to reduce atmospheric pollution and environmental degradation. He welcomed the continuing work on benchmarks and indicators, since they would facilitate the assessment of progress achieved in the implementation of the Convention.

29. The African Group hoped that the Conference of Parties would adopt the results of the work on benchmarks and indicators at its second session, together with a draft resolution calling for the establishment of a committee on the review of the implementation of the Convention (a matter on which they hoped the developed countries would be more flexible); memoranda on cooperation between the permanent secretariat of the Convention and IFAD on the one hand, and, on the other hand, among IFAD, UNDP, the World Bank and other relevant international organizations; and the rules of procedure currently being negotiated. Lastly, the African Group hoped that the Conference of Parties would agree to allocate 3 of the 11 seats on the Bureau to African countries.

30. He reiterated the appeal by the Conference of Parties to the developed countries, multilateral and bilateral financial institutions, the private sector and non-governmental organizations to offer voluntary contributions in order to enable the global mechanism to be launched in January 1998. He also urged countries to ratify the Convention so that at least 150 parties thereto would have done so by the second session of the Conference of Parties.

31. He urged delegations to support the draft resolution of the Group of 77 concerning the implementation of the Convention and noted that it was based in large measure on the resolution adopted by the General Assembly following the first session of the Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and took into account the decisions adopted by the Conference of Parties at its first session. He also hoped that the General Assembly would decide its current session to defray conference servicing costs from the regular budget of the United Nations and that negotiations on that recommendation would not prove difficult.

32. The countries of Africa were committed to completing work on their national, subregional and regional programmes of action as soon as possible and looked forward to concluding partnership agreements as a step towards the full implementation of the Convention.

33. **Mr. Ronnenberg** (Marshall Islands) said that his delegation fully associated itself with the statement by the Chairman of the Group of 77, as well as with the views expressed by the representative of Samoa at the 30th meeting on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States during the discussion of agenda items 98 (c), (e) and (f).

34. He extended condolences to the Cook Islands and French Polynesia, which had been devastated by a cyclone the preceding week. Although the distinction between weather and climate must be kept very clear, it was equally clear that there were linkages. Climate change affected weather patterns in different places in different ways. His delegation was very supportive of current global observation projects, since they provided an opportunity to develop and maintain excellent baseline data, and he favoured their further strengthening. The work of the El Niño observation system being developed in the Pacific by the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme in collaboration with numerous international organizations was of vital importance not only to the livelihoods of the inhabitants of the area, but also to increasing global understanding of the

El Niño phenomenon. Information on the effects of El Niño on Pacific fisheries also would provide information to predict the effects of climate change on those valuable resources.

35. It was also important to make early warning systems more accurate, and he urged those in a position to do so to assist in that effort. The fact that the economies of several developed countries were directly affected by the El Niño phenomenon suggested that the response to support in that area would be better than it had been with regard to climate change.

36. He wished to clarify a point his delegation had made at the 30th meeting with respect to climate change. Scientists had determined which countries were responsible for the increased levels of greenhouse gases which contributed to global warming, which in turn was causing rising sea levels which were expected to wipe out islands that had been a safe haven for people for 2,000 years. However, none of the countries which had the capacity to make serious reductions in greenhouse gases had shown any willingness to do so yet, with the result that migration had been suggested by scientists as a more realistic option for the inhabitants of the small island developing States concerned. That position constituted an abdication of responsibility on the part of the developed countries.

37. **Mr. Ito** (Japan) said that his country had always believed desertification to be a serious global environmental problem and a fundamental obstacle to sustainable development in developing countries, and it had made positive contributions to efforts to control the phenomenon. He welcomed the agreement reached on a global mechanism for the mobilizing of financial resources for the implementation of the Convention agreed upon at the first Conference of the Parties and said that his Government was in the process of taking appropriate formal action with respect to the Convention.

38. In order further to strengthen activities relating to the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, efforts must be made to translate the Yokohama Strategy for a Safer World: Guidelines for Natural Disaster Prevention, Preparedness and Mitigation and the Plan of Action contained therein into concrete activities to be carried out with international cooperation at the domestic, regional and international levels. In order to achieve the original objectives of the Decade, it also was necessary to strengthen the existing International Framework of Action for the Decade, and his delegation was pleased that a closing event was planned at the end of the Decade to adopt a strategy to guide disaster reduction activities into the twenty-first century. His country, which had originally proposed the Decade and had contributed substantial human and financial resources in support of its activities, would continue its active role in that field.

39. **Mr. Legwaila** (Botswana), speaking on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), said that the members of SADC, all of which had ratified the Convention, accorded high priority to problems of land degradation and desertification because of the frequent and prolonged cycles of drought in the region. Among the most pressing problems were unsustainable agricultural practices in some areas, unpredictable periods of drought and/or severe thunderstorms which eroded topsoil and high levels of poverty, particularly in rural communities. SADC members had developed the expertise to deal with drought through early warning systems. Desertification, however, was more difficult to combat because it was a consequence of a continuous natural and man-made process in which the land resource base gradually lost its potential to produce food, thereby seriously threatening the economic foundation of the inhabitants of the affected region.

40. He described a number of regional efforts undertaken by SADC to counter the grave effects of drought and desertification, and noted that freshwater management strategies were in place as well. The Community urged the United Nations agencies and programmes to increase their technical and financial assistance in the field of freshwater management.

41. SADC welcomed the outcome of the first Conference of the Parties to the Convention, in particular the selection of Bonn as the permanent seat of the secretariat and the designation of IFAD as the organization which was to administer the Global Mechanism. Adequate funding for the implementation of the Convention would play a vital role in supporting the efforts of SADC countries to eliminate the negative consequences of drought and desertification and it was therefore crucial that the Global Mechanism demonstrate the ability to leverage the requisite funding for the implementation of the Convention and provide the necessary accessibility and responsiveness to the needs of affected countries.

42. The members of SADC looked forward to strengthening their existing partnerships and forging new ones in order to promote the implementation of the Convention, and they therefore appealed to the international community for financial and technical support to implement the subregional action programme and national programmes.

43. **Mr. Nyambi** (Director, United Nations Development Programme Office to Combat Desertification and Drought)

said that it was important to capitalize on the momentum generated by the first session of the Conference of Parties to the Convention. The UNDP Office to Combat Desertification and Drought and UNDP in general viewed the Convention as an important framework for promoting sustainable human development in the drylands of the world. UNDP had made poverty elimination and environmental regeneration two of the most important centrepieces of its current mission.

44. His office and the UNDP offices in the field had been providing support for interim activities leading up to the implementation of the Convention, including the launching of national action programmes and subregional and regional action programmes in most regions and a variety of other activities, including the establishment of national desertification funds. The UNDP/United Nations Sahelian Office (UNSO) planned to intensify its work in those areas, as well as on drought preparedness and mitigation, environmental/desertification information systems, including indicators, and a variety of thematic initiatives calling for new and innovative participatory approaches, the strengthening of the role of women and support for networking, advocacy and outreach activities.

45. To accomplish those goals, UNDP expected to mobilize "seed"/catalytic resources through the relevant UNDP Trust Fund. The Administrator of UNDP had begun the process of designating the head of the Global Mechanism and supported the substantive work of the mechanism under the collaborative institutional arrangement involving UNDP, IFAD and the World Bank. UNDP considered the Global Mechanism to be a critical instrument for the success of the Convention and hoped that it could count on all its partners to ensure that the mechanism could begin operations on a sound footing.

46. He drew attention to General Assembly resolution 50/114 and said that in the period 1992-1996, UNDP core or regular resources allocated to support development activities relating to desertification had been on the order of $1 billion. Support through the regular programme of UNDP would continue into future programming cycles. In addition, substantial resources had been mobilized by other UNDP mechanisms and programmes. Financial support through UNSO during the interim period amounted to close to $14 million, channelled primarily through the Trust Fund for Developing Countries Affected by Drought, Famine and Malnutrition. The traditional contributors — Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden and the Netherlands — had continued to make significant contributions in the interim period, and Australia, Italy, France, Luxembourg, Switzerland, Monaco, Portugal and the United States and some private donors had also contributed to the Trust Fund in the interim period.

47. It was particularly noteworthy that a number of affected developing countries had contributed as well, including Benin, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Lesotho, Namibia, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. UNDP had been very pleased to note the recent announcement by South Africa that it planned to become a contributor to the Fund. He paid a tribute to private citizens who were making contributions. In recognition of all those contributions and in view of the major responsibilities to be handled by UNDP/UNSO, he appealed for continued and increased support to the Trust Fund with a view to the full implementation of the Convention.

48. **Mr. Lozano** (Mexico) said that the two devastating hurricanes which had struck his country in rapid succession in 1997 had affected the most vulnerable sectors of the population most severely. That experience had underlined the importance of strengthening national and international strategies for natural disaster prevention and reduction. The Mexican Government had incorporated the four basic elements of the Yokohama Strategy into its plans. It also placed special emphasis on programmes to combat poverty in order to create conditions that would reduce the impact of a disaster.

49. Some of the evidence indicated that those hurricanes had resulted from the El Niño phenomenon, whose manifestations ranged from floods and storms in some parts of the world to severe drought in others. His delegation had joined in formulating a draft resolution on international efforts to mitigate the effects of El Niño, and hoped that it would receive support.

50. Turning to the subject of climate change, he said that the conceptual basis for the agreement on climate change had been the principles of the precautionary approach and of common but differentiated responsibilities. In response to the first, specific measures to combat environmental degradation had been taken. Unfortunately, that did not seem to be the case for the second. The industrialized countries must take the lead in combating environmental degradation; however, the rest of the international community could not stand idly by. Developing countries must follow that lead and take measures with their support and assistance. There had been widely varying interpretations of that principle, from the view that all members of the international community should make the same commitments regarding reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, to the view that it was virtually a licence to pollute. The problem was global, and as such required global solutions, but the aspect of

equity must not be forgotten. In order to maintain the equity implicit in that principle, any agreement to be reached must remain within the framework of the principles agreed at the Earth Summit.

51. With regard to desertification, his delegation fully associated itself with the statement made by Paraguay on behalf of the Rio Group. The problem was more serious in some regions than others, but it was global in nature. Coordination among the three agreements arising out of the Rio Conference was needed in order to ensure that each aspect received equal treatment.

52. **Ms. Rahantabololo** (Madagascar) said that the Convention to Combat Desertification took an innovative approach by encouraging partnership rather than assistance and established new relationships among Governments, development experts, non-governmental organizations and local communities. Her delegation welcomed that approach and was also encouraged by the possibilities of cooperation between African and Asian countries and their development partners.

53. In Madagascar, the national environmental policy centred around the ongoing integration of man into the sustainable use of natural resources. The Government's approach, with the active participation of all sectors, utilized regional programming in a context of decentralization and community-based management of natural resources. For example, the southern part of Madagascar was stricken by drought and increasingly threatened by desertification, which had led to the establishment of a special office for the development of that region.

54. Madagascar had begun the process leading to accession to the Framework Convention on Climate Change. In its view, only the effective implementation of all the environmental conventions would provide the necessary synergy to ensure sustainable development. International cooperation and financial support were essential. By ratifying the Convention to Combat Desertification, many African countries had demonstrated their adherence to the principle of "common but differentiated responsibility". There was still time to combat desertification, but it was running out, and the current generation must choose what environmental heritage it would leave to future generations.

55. **Mr. Kerem** (Israel) said that Israel was at the geographic crossroads of three regions, and had served as an intensive laboratory for desertification problems. The Middle East, of which it was also a part, was one of the world's most extensive arid regions. In Israel, 90 per cent of the country was dryland, but it was barely desertified, because from the outset, the Government had practised a policy of sustainable development and had conducted extensive research which was then applied in the field. Its research had indicated that traditional livestock grazing practices eventually led to a loss of soil productivity, and that dryland agriculture was not sustainable without irrigation, which meant centralized national water resource management. Restoring forest cover, not for timber but for sustainable development of the environment, was another important factor in combating soil erosion, promoting biodiversity and slowing global warming.

56. Israel had shared the knowledge it had gained with other dryland developing countries of Africa and the Middle East through training courses and the sharing of expertise. By investing in prevention of desertification rather than combating already existing problems, by stressing science and technology while at the same time respecting indigenous knowledge, and by adopting a "bottom-up" approach to training, Israel had played an active role as a party to the Convention. Israel was in the final stages of planning an International Centre for Combating Desertification in the Negev Desert, and was currently participating in a desertification initiative with the Palestinian Authority, Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia and the World Bank. As part of its obligations under the Convention, Israel would continue to share its experience with others and invest in the continuing fight against desertification and the promotion of sustainable development.

57. **Mr. Azaiez** (Tunisia) said that his delegation welcomed the first steps taken towards implementation of the Convention to Combat Desertification during the first Conference of the Parties, which would bolster the commitments made under Agenda 21. It also welcomed the decisions reached on the Global Mechanism for the mobilization of financial resources. His delegation also strongly supported involvement by non-governmental organizations in the activities of future meetings of the Conference of the Parties and the fact that the administrative and budgetary independence of the Convention had been maintained.

58. The developed countries parties to the Convention had made commitments to mobilize financial resources, facilitate transfers of technology, knowledge and expertise, and support the efforts of developing countries parties, particularly in Africa, to plan and implement their own strategies to combat desertification and drought.

59. The efforts undertaken in Tunisia over the past three decades had led to the recognition of the human factor in desertification and greater knowledge of the mechanics of erosion and desertification, as well as techniques to combat

it that were socially acceptable and economically viable. The problem was so complex in Tunisia, however, that despite the measurable results of its efforts, the progression of desertification had not been stemmed. In meeting its international commitments, Tunisia had established an environment and development observatory enabling it to gather precise and exhaustive environmental data. His delegation endorsed the statement of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the Group of 77 calling for an independent financing mechanism with its own resources for the implementation of the Convention.

60. Finally, he noted that his Government's cooperation in the area of desertification had been with the Palestinian Authority and not with Israel.

61. **Mr. Tiendrebeogo** (Burkina Faso) said that the agreements reached at the first Conference of the Parties to the Convention to Combat Desertification had come just in time, particularly for the African countries, since they had again experienced one of the driest years on record, which would mean further hardship for the people facing the resulting water and food shortages. There was a clear link between the Convention to Combat Desertification and the fight to eliminate poverty. His delegation welcomed in particular the consensus reached on the Global Mechanism. The establishment of a Special Fund and the possibility of relying on other mechanisms established by the host agency were acceptable solutions, insofar as there was a real desire to contribute to the funds and mechanisms. His delegation welcomed in particular the decision taken on the use of traditional knowledge and its links to modern technology. While Burkina Faso did not intend to live in the past, it was important for a country such as his to call on certain traditional practices in combating drought and desertification.

62. In conclusion, his delegation appealed for firm support to the permanent secretariat of the Convention in the many challenges it would face in the coming months.

63. **Mr. M'mella** (Kenya) said that efforts to combat drought and desertification and to reduce natural disasters were increasingly attracting the international community's attention because of their close relationship to sustainable development. His country was seriously concerned about desertification and had signed and ratified the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. In that regard, his Government, with the international community's support, had already established a National Commission on Desertification and Drought, a cross-sectoral body responsible, *inter alia*, for institutional networking and advising the Government on all issues related to the implementation of the Convention. As part of the national action programmes, his Government, in collaboration with the Netherlands Government and the United Nations Environment Programme, had carried out a degradation assessment and mapping exercise covering two districts in northern Kenya.

64. His delegation supported the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee's resolution concerning urgent action for Africa. In that regard, in order to implement the obligations of the Convention meaningfully, the developing countries, especially those in Africa, would require the provision of secure, stable, adequate and predictable financial resources, as well as the transfer of sound technology.

65. The international community should recognize the vital importance of maximum international cooperation and partnership in combating desertification and mitigating its effects. In particular, it should support the creation of a Global Mechanism that would have the capacity to increase the flow of resources from the North to the South and within and among developing countries, with a view to ensuring availability of new and additional financial resources.

66. He hoped that the International Decade for National Disaster Reduction would result in a more focused plan of action to mitigate the effects of such disasters and to assist disaster-prone countries in the area of preparedness. That could be achieved through improved access to relevant technology and capacity-building in risk management, enhanced technical assistance, provision of scientific support through relevant research initiatives and the provision of adequate financial resources, especially during emergencies. His Government appreciated the $200,000 it had received from UNDP to strengthen coordination for an immediate response to El Niño.

67. **Mr. Andreassen** (Norway) said that the degradation of productive lands posed immense and urgent challenges for the international community. Land degradation and food insecurity were basically poverty-related problems. Greater efforts were required to improve the situation of the poorest segments of the population who were combating desertification. Emphasis should be put on agricultural education and human resources development. The fight against poverty also called for a more equitable distribution of resources and an increased contribution from the international community.

68. In his view, the most important issue at the first Conference of the Parties had been to achieve a coherent and coordinated multilateral effort at the country level. He therefore welcomed the agreement that had been made

between UNDP, IFAD and the World Bank to join forces in supporting the Global Mechanism. Those organizations had comparative advantages in combating desertification.

69. His Government saw the Convention to Combat Desertification as an important means of fulfilling its overall goal in development cooperation. The Convention was the first international legal instrument that clearly promoted people's participation as a prerequisite for development success. Its emphasis on participation highlighted the necessity to involve the entire local population, especially farmers, who were most often women. In that regard, there was a twofold rationale for focusing on women. First, development could be sustainable only if women, as well as men, were integrated into the development process. Second, women must be given their fair share of available resources. Cooperation among all levels of Government, communities, non-governmental organizations and landholders was needed in order to establish a better understanding of the nature and value of land resources and to work towards their sustainable use.

70. Recognizing that the poorest and most seriously affected countries, particularly in Africa, would continue to need international assistance to effectively combat desertification, Norway allocated more than 50 per cent of its bilateral assistance, and a substantial part of its multilateral assistance, to sub-Saharan Africa.

71. **Mr. Rae-kwon Chung** (Republic of Korea) said his Government was concerned that the negotiations of the Ad Hoc Group on the Berlin Mandate aimed at strengthening the commitment of high-emission countries were degenerating. Indeed, a global consensus could not be achieved if the country which produced the largest emissions of greenhouse gases claimed that it would accept a binding target only when low-emission countries accepted binding commitments at the same time. It was particularly ironic that high-emission countries, whose people enjoyed large private cars and lower petrol prices, were claiming that not enough was being done by low-emission countries, whose population still relied heavily on public transport and smaller cars and paid higher petrol prices.

72. It should not be assumed that low-emission countries were not doing anything just because they did not accept binding obligations. Likewise, it should not be assumed that high-emission countries were the only ones taking necessary measures for climate change just because they were assuming binding obligations. Indeed, many developing countries had already adopted important measures and were making the necessary sacrifices by paying three to four times more for their fuel and energy than the biggest emission-producing country did. It was vital for high-emission countries to prove their commitment and set an example for others to follow in order to promote concerted global action whereby all countries could participate, based on common but differentiated responsibilities.

73. His country had introduced one of the first energy-efficiency grading systems for energy and electric appliances. It also had one of the highest petrol and energy consumption taxes in the world. The Republic of Korea stood ready to make further positive contributions to the reduction of emissions and to the effort to protect the global climate.

74. **Mr. Stefánsson** (Iceland) said that his country was experiencing large-scale erosion and loss of vegetative cover. Indeed, areas formerly covered by fertile soil were now completely barren. In that regard, case histories from all continents presented at an international workshop on rangeland desertification, hosted by Iceland in cooperation with the European Union in September 1997, had amply demonstrated that the processes leading to desertification in different climatic regions of the world were strikingly similar. Desertification was therefore a global problem which called for global action and leadership. A global partnership was needed to find the most effective solutions.

75. He hoped that Iceland's experience in fighting desertification would contribute to efforts being undertaken in other regions. By the same token, through cooperation under the Convention, Icelanders expected to learn more about how they could halt erosion and revegetate their own country. The implementation of the Convention to Combat Desertification must not be viewed in isolation from other relevant conventions such as the Convention on Biological Diversity. Due recognition should also be given to the important linkages among those conventions and the Framework Convention on Climate Change.

76. **Ms. Amoah** (Ghana) said that the Convention to Combat Desertification needed to be accorded high priority because deserts and drylands covered approximately 40 per cent of the total land surface of the Earth; 250 million people from over 100 countries were directly affected by desertification, while one billion people were also at risk from the negative effects of dryland degradation. Moreover, the activities of the Convention were aimed at reducing environmental damage and poverty and improving the lives of those who were adversely affected by desertification.

77. As a legally binding document with a global objective, the Convention adopted a pragmatic and participatory approach, and constituted another framework for a new

partnership for development cooperation between the North and the South in combating desertification. In pursuing that new partnership, priority attention should be given to Africa, without prejudice to action in other regions, because that continent was the region most vulnerable to desertification and to the effects of drought.

78. All parties should fulfil their commitments under the Convention and make the necessary contributions in order to ensure that the Global Mechanism could begin operating, as scheduled, by 1 January 1998. As agreed at the first Conference of the Parties, the secretariat should, in consultation with IFAD, UNDP and the World Bank, begin work on the development of a memorandum of understanding.

79. **Mr. Özügergin** (Turkey) said that 85 per cent of Turkey would become desert by the year 2020 if the current process of desertification was not checked. The single most important cause of desertification in Turkey was erosion. Indeed, approximately 550 million tons of soil, including some 9 million tons of precious minerals such as phosphates, magnesium and nitrogen, were lost every year to erosion. Apart from natural causes, soil erosion was also caused by improper agricultural and land utilization practices leading eventually to floods and environmental pollution.

80. Turkey therefore accorded considerable importance to the Convention to Combat Desertification. Several government departments, with the support of non-governmental organizations, dealt with the implementation of its provisions. Public awareness was crucial in the fight against desertification. To that end, educational programmes for various audiences were being implemented. Other activities carried out through public-private partnerships included rangeland improvement, industrial plantation, watershed erosion control and erosion mapping projects. New planting, ploughing and terracing methods had been developed and were in use.

81. **Ms. Bai Yongjie** (China) said that economic growth remained a major priority for the developing countries that had been the most affected by drought and desertification. Efforts in that area must therefore be integrated into the overall plan on poverty elimination and economic development in order to achieve sustainable development in the developing countries. Partnership was also essential in combating desertification. So were the international community's financial support and the transfer of technology on preferential terms. Indeed, without global collective efforts, it was highly unlikely that the process of desertification could be reversed. She expressed the hope that the developed countries would fulfil their obligations under the Convention.

82. Her Government attached great importance to combating desertification and had been actively involved in the negotiations concerning the Convention, which had entered into force in China in May 1997. While considerable work had been undertaken to enhance the fulfilment of the relevant obligations under the Convention, including the establishment of a national committee for the implementation of the Convention, a training centre for combating desertification, the promulgation and implementation of a national action programme for combating desertification and various public awareness and education programmes, much still remained to be done. Her Government was prepared to work with the international community to achieve the common goal of effectively combating desertification.

83. **Ms. Alou** (Niger) said that, like other Sahelian countries, her country had been experiencing acute environmental problems for a number of decades, which had had serious consequences for food security. Productive potential was declining because of climate change and human activities. The situation was exacerbating conflicts between groups competing for the use of available resources. It was impoverishing the burgeoning population and it had led to the over-exploitation of wood and pastures. The situation was serious but not desperate. With the assistance of the international community, successive Governments had tried to find solutions to those serious problems by adopting policies designed to improve the quality of life of the people.

84. As far as environmental policy was concerned, a national environmental board for sustainable development had been set up. It was responsible, *inter alia*, for preparing and implementing the national environment plan, raising awareness on the issue and coordinating action on the environment, monitoring the utilization of resources and liaising between national institutions and the Niger's cooperation partners.

85. Her country spared no efforts to combat the adverse effects of drought and desertification. The focus of its environmental protection efforts was on reforestation, the development of natural forests and the popularization of techniques to reduce the effects of water and wind erosion. However, it lacked the resources to undertake a more comprehensive venture to combat drought and desertification and continued to rely on bilateral and multilateral cooperation.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.